Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE STANDING ORDERS

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Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

The Honourable Steve Peters, MPP,
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly

Sir,

Your Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly has the honour to present its Report and commends it to the House.

B. Balkissoon.

Bas Balkissoon, MPP,
Chair

Queen's Park
October, 2008

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LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Question Period be scheduled at 10:30 a.m. on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

2. That Deferred Votes be scheduled immediately following Question Period and that Petitions be scheduled during Routine Proceedings.

3. That Question Period be preceded by a five-minute bell.

4. That the legislative calendar, beginning in February, be adjusted to reflect "four weeks on" and "one week off".

5. That the House commence sitting each Monday morning at 10:30 a.m., followed by 9 a.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday morning.

6. That Routine Proceedings be at 1 p.m. on Monday and Thursday, and 3 p.m. on Tuesday and Wednesday.

7. That the House should consider reviewing the use of E-petitions.

8. That introduction of guests occur twice per day – once in the morning and once in the afternoon – with a duration of five minutes each time, and the introduction of the guests be done by the Members.

9. That private members' business be conducted on Thursday afternoon, with three private members' bills or resolutions debated each day.

10. That private members' bills can be sponsored by more than one Member, and by Members of different parties.

A. INTRODUCTION

On May 1, 2008, the House adopted a motion that provided for provisional changes to the Standing Orders. The terms of that motion also provided as follows:

> **The provisional Standing Orders shall be deemed to be referred to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, which is authorized to conduct a review of the Standing Orders during the 2008 Summer Adjournment of the House. The Committee shall present its report to the House containing its opinions, observations and recommendations on the Standing Orders of the Assembly no later than the first Thursday following the resumption of the House in Fall, 2008.**

After advertising its hearings on the Ontario parliamentary channel and on the Assembly's website, the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly met on July 29 and July 30 to hear from invited guests and witnesses, and on August 11 and September 24 for report writing.

The Committee wishes to thank the Hon. Steve Peters (Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario), Deborah F. Deller (Clerk of the House), Arleigh Holder (Director, Broadcasting and Recording Service), Peggy Brooks (Managing Editor, Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services), Nelson Wiseman (Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Toronto), and Keith Leslie and Murray Campbell (members of the Press Gallery) for their presentations to the Committee and for fielding questions from Members of the Committee.

The Committee also wishes to thank the Clerk of the Committee and the Committees Branch for their procedural advice and administrative support services, and the Procedural Clerk (Research) and the Journals and Procedural Research Branch for their procedural research and report writing services.

B. BACKGROUND

Before reviewing the Standing Orders, it is useful to review the chronology of significant events that preceded the 2008 provisional Standing Order changes:

- On December 11, 2007 the House ordered "[t]hat the House Leaders of the recognized parties shall agree to terms and an all party panel composed of no more than two members from each recognized party shall be appointed to make recommendations to the Speaker on ways to make working at the Ontario legislature more family friendly for MPPs."

- In a February 10, 2008 letter to other party Leaders and House Leaders, the Premier and the Government House Leader made specific proposals for changes to the Standing Orders. There was no consensus or agreement on Standing Order changes among the House Leaders.

- On April 16, the government tabled a motion providing for (a) provisional changes to the Standing Orders, (b) a mechanism for the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly to review and report on the Standing Orders, and (c) a mechanism for the extension or permanent adoption of the provisional Standing Orders. This motion and an Opposition amendment thereto were debated on April 21, 22, 23 and 28. On April 30, the House ordered that the debate be time allocated. On May 1, the amendment was lost on an 18-48 recorded vote, and immediately afterwards the motion carried on a 49-19 recorded vote.

- Pursuant to the May 1 Order of the House, the provisional Standing Orders came into force on May 5, and will last until 11:59 p.m. of the fourth Friday following the resumption of the House in the Fall of 2008.

C. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Start time of Question Period

The start time of Question Period was the most contentious of the issues raised in the Committee. Some Members indicated that the change to a morning Question Period (a) does not give them and their staff adequate time to prepare for Question Period (the most important part of their legislative day), and (b) impedes the ability of the media to "scrum" Cabinet Ministers and to report on public business.

The Committee is of the view that Question Period should remain in the morning, for the following reasons:

- most Members prefer a morning start to Question Period over an afternoon start
- the Press Gallery is not of one mind on the issue
- expert testimony before the Committee suggests that the changes (a) are not a threat to democracy, (b) do not restrict the Opposition's ability to hold the government to account, (c) will not prevent the minority from being heard, (d) have not made much difference in the media's coverage of provincial politics, and (e) are not a freedom of the press issue.

The Committee also wants to underscore that the provisional Standing Orders have altered the start time of Question Period – not its frequency, length or internal structure – and that it is longer than the Question Periods in most other Canadian jurisdictions.

However, in order to accommodate the Press Gallery's concerns that (a) the late morning end to Question Period has created difficulties for those media that conduct news broadcasts at noon and (b) Ministers have less time for the media after Question Period because other meetings (e.g. caucus meetings,

Cabinet meetings) now start almost immediately after the end of Question Period, the Committee is of the view that Question Period should commence 15 minutes earlier than it currently does, thereby providing more time between the end of Question Period (on the one hand) and the start of those broadcasts and of Members' other meetings (on the other hand).

The Committee therefore recommends that Question Period be scheduled at 10:30 a.m. on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

2. Deferred Votes and Petitions

The Committee notes that the Press Gallery also has concerns about the eclectic timing of votes since the provisional Standing Orders came into force. The Committee is of the view that this would be less of a problem if the proceeding Deferred Votes were placed adjacent to Question Period (as used to be the case before the provisional Standing Orders came into force). In order to ensure that morning proceedings end by 12 noon if this view were to be implemented, the Committee is of the view that the proceeding Petitions should be moved to the afternoon, i.e., it should become the last item of the afternoon's Routine Proceedings (as used to be the case before the provisional Standing Orders came into force).

The Committee therefore recommends that Deferred Votes be scheduled immediately following Question Period and that Petitions be scheduled during Routine Proceedings.

The implementation of this recommendation would also tend to provide the media with more access to Members before noon.

3. Question Period bell

The Committee notes that, as debate during Orders of the Day winds down at mid-morning, many Members are entering the Chamber with a view to taking their seats for the start of Question Period. The accompanying noise is often disruptive to the proceedings and to the Member who has the floor. The Committee is of the view that the mid-morning transition from Orders of the Day to Question Period would be more decorous if there were a short

break between these two proceedings, but that the break should not take time away from Question Period.

The Committee therefore recommends that Question Period be preceded by a five-minute bell.

This recommendation also addresses the Press Gallery's preference for a specific start time to Question Period.

4. Parliamentary calendar

In the course of its deliberations, the Committee reflected on whether the parliamentary calendar should be adjusted so that there are more opportunities (a) for MPPs to tend to constituency business in the spring and fall meeting periods of the House, and (b) for staff to address workload issues. The Committee is of the view that the spring meeting period should commence in February (i.e. the month before it currently does), and that the spring and fall meeting periods should consist of cycles of approximately four weeks of meetings and a one-week constituency break.

The Committee therefore recommends that the legislative calendar, beginning in February, be adjusted to reflect "four weeks on" and "one week off".

5. Monday morning meetings

The Committee notes that Members are generally satisfied with having morning/afternoon meetings instead of afternoon/evening meetings. Since the provisional Standing Orders came into force, the House has commenced its daily meetings at 9 a.m. and it is scheduled to rise daily at 5:45 p.m., making for 27 hours of regularly scheduled House meeting time per week – considerably more than the 20 hours of regularly scheduled House meeting time per week before the provisional Standing Orders came into force.

The Committee notes, however, that those Members who do not have short commutes to the Legislative Building have to travel to Toronto on a Sunday in order to attend House meetings that commence at 9 a.m. on Monday, and that this detracts from familial and constituency commitments. The

Committee is of the view that this problem could be alleviated if the House were to commence its Monday meetings at mid-morning. A mid-morning start on Monday would also enable legislative staff to prepare the Chamber for that week.

The Committee is reluctant to recommend mid-morning starts for all days that the House meets because such a move would eliminate six hours of scheduled debate time per week.

The Committee therefore recommends that the House commence sitting each Monday morning at 10:30 a.m., followed by 9 a.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday morning.

6. Afternoon meetings

The Committee is generally satisfied with the start time of the afternoon's Routine Proceedings under the provisional Standing Orders. The later start time on Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons affords Members sufficient time to attend caucus meetings and Cabinet meetings.

The Committee therefore recommends that Routine Proceedings be at 1 p.m. on Monday and Thursday, and 3 p.m. on Tuesday and Wednesday.

7. Electronic petitions

In the course of its deliberations, the Committee reflected briefly on the concept of electronic petitions (E-petitions) as a means of facilitating citizen engagement in the democratic process. The Committee is of the view that the House should consider reviewing the efficacy of E-petitions.

The Committee therefore recommends that the House should consider reviewing the use of E-petitions.

8. Introduction of visitors

Under the provisional Standing Orders, the Speaker – and only the Speaker – introduces Members' guests in the proceeding Introduction of Visitors;

furthermore, Members seeking to have their guests recognized at that time must provide the Speaker with relevant information on the guests at least one hour before the start of that day's Question Period.

In order to engage Ontarians in the democratic process, the Committee is of the view that (a) Members should be allowed to welcome the presence of their guests in the Chamber, and (b) since not all guests visit the Chamber at the single time currently designated for their introduction, there should be two set opportunities each day for Members to introduce their guests.

The Committee therefore recommends that introduction of guests occur twice per day – once in the morning and once in the afternoon – with a duration of five minutes each time, and the introduction of the guests be done by the Members.

In the view of the Committee, neither the provisional Standing Orders nor this recommendation precludes the Speaker from exercising his or her customary authority to introduce special visitors (e.g. dignitaries, former Members) when he or she sees fit.

9. Private Members' Public Business

Some Members would like Private Members' Public Business to be returned to its morning time slot. However, the Committee is of the view that most Members prefer the afternoon time slot. On this point, the Committee notes that expert testimony before the Committee suggests that the timing of Private Members' Public Business is less important than the fact that private members' public bills will receive substantially more time for debate.

The Committee is also of the view that the provisional Standing Orders' extension of the overall debate time for this period to 2.5 hours (in order to accommodate consideration of a third item of private members' public business) has been a welcome change.

The Committee therefore recommends that private members' business be conducted on Thursday afternoon, with three private members' bills or resolutions debated each day.

10. Co-sponsorship of bills

The Committee is of the view that more thought should be given to fostering co-operation among Members – regardless of their Party affiliation – and to moving forward with private members' public bills. This view is consistent with the view taken by the Committee in 2002 in its *Report on Enhancing the Role of the Private Member*. As a first step in this direction, Members should be allowed to co-sponsor private members' public bills.

The Committee therefore recommends that private members' bills can be sponsored by more than one Member, and by Members of different parties.

D. CONCLUSION

The Committee is of the view that the 2008 provisional Standing Orders go a long way towards addressing the work/life balance issues that were pervasive for Members when the legislative day had evening meetings on top of daytime meetings. The changes are relatively modest compared to some Standing Order changes in previous Parliaments, and they have increased the amount of regularly scheduled debate time that is available on a daily and weekly basis.

The 2008 changes have undergone a short trial period, and the Committee has also had an opportunity to hear from Members and witnesses on their impact and how they can be improved. In this report, the Committee is recommending changes to the start time of certain legislative proceedings and Monday morning meetings, and to the parliamentary calendar. If implemented, these recommendations will enable Members to better balance their parliamentary duties with their responsibilities and commitments to their families and constituents, and with their availability to the media.

In addition, the Committee is recommending (a) changes to the way in which visitors are recognized in the House and a review of the concept of electronic petitions in order to foster more citizen engagement in the

democratic process, and (b) that Members be allowed to co-sponsor private members' public bills in order to foster more co-operation among Members.

In closing, the Committee wishes to extend its gratitude to those dedicated staff in the public service, the Office of the Assembly, and Members' offices who have adjusted their schedules in order to accommodate the 2008 changes.

APPENDIX A

DISSENTING OPINION

OF THE

PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

DISSENTING OPINION

To: Members of the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly
From: Ontario's Official Opposition, represented by the Progressive Conservative Caucus
Re: Report of the Committee on the Review of the Provisional Standing Orders
Date: October 1, 2008

Dear Committee Members:

The only point agreed to by all three Parties in committee is that Question Period should be preceded by a 5-minute bell. Since agreement could not be reached on any other government recommendations, we feel compelled as Ontario's Official Opposition to submit this dissenting opinion. We have included excerpts from previous submissions to reiterate our key points and to demonstrate our consistency on this issue.

On December 11, 2007, thanks to the tireless efforts of Nepean-Carleton PC MPP Lisa MacLeod, the following government motion was passed unanimously in the House: "I move that the House leaders of the recognized parties shall agree to terms, and an all-party panel composed of no more than two members from each recognized party shall be appointed to make recommendations to the Speaker on ways to make working at the Ontario legislature more family friendly for members of provincial Parliament."

The government refused to allow this committee to be involved in any way, shape or form in the proposed changes.

On February 28, 2008, in a letter to the Premier signed by John Tory and Bob Runciman, our Caucus then requested that the proposed changes to the Standing Orders be referred to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly before being tested in the legislature. We also indicated in this letter that we would be "open to discussing other models, provided the principle of meaningful all-party MPP participation is respected." This letter was also ignored by the government.

We continue to take issue with the Liberals' decision to hold Question Period in the morning, just so they can better avoid public and media scrutiny. With fewer resources and staff than McGuinty Cabinet Ministers, Opposition Members have been at a clear disadvantage in effectively preparing for morning Question Period. When we can't do the job we were elected to do, parliamentary democracy is undermined. The government continues to disregard this point, as evidenced by the Liberal members of committee pushing for an even earlier start to Question Period of 10:30 am.

AMAPCEO (Association of Management, Administrative and Professional Crown Employees of Ontario) submitted its concerns in writing to committee, noting that: "We respectfully urge the Standing Committee to acknowledge that the change in Question Period has nothing to do with making the legislature more family-friendly for MPPs, but that it does have a negative impact on the family lives of many public servants who have

to prepare briefing material for Question Period, and to recommend that the time of Question Period revert from the morning back to the early afternoon."

Representing the Queen's Park Press Gallery, Keith Leslie mentioned during the hearings that, "The new timing of Question Period and Cabinet and Caucus meetings has directly led to what the press gallery strongly feels is reduced access to Cabinet Ministers." The press gallery recommended a firm start time for QP in the afternoon or in the morning (as long as it ends by 11:15 am to meet noon media deadlines). Since an 8:30 am start time to accommodate a QP that ends by 11:15 am is not feasible, the most logical place to hold Question Period at a firm start time that doesn't interfere with "noon crunch time" is the afternoon.

We have noted on numerous occasions that the new proposed schedule is erratic, unpredictable, inefficient and undemocratic. It is centred around QP to the extent that no other Routine Proceeding matters anymore, resulting in a severely minimized role of the legislature and its elected 'non-Cabinet' officials.

We would argue that the split in Routine Proceedings is ultimately the main reason why the new schedule is erratic and impedes smooth operation of the legislature. The Clerk of the Assembly, Deb Deller, mentioned during her presentation that the committee "might want to consider reuniting Routine Proceedings and having them considered within one time period".

It is not surprising that divided Routine Proceedings would lead to large gaps in the schedule and unused debate time. Between May 5, 2008 and June 18, 2008, a total of 34 hours and 12 minutes of debate time was lost due to early House adjournments. Given that the House is supposed to sit for 27 hours per week under the Provisional Standing Orders, this represents about five complete sitting days, or more than a complete week of sitting time!

The most sensible and practical way to solve these problems is to simply reunite Routine Proceedings, which includes "Oral Questions" or Question Period. The most logical time slot in which to hold Routine Proceedings is the afternoon, where more time is available. While Routine Proceedings can last for as little as 30 minutes, the Standing Orders both old and new recognize they could last as long as 1.5 hours.

Tributes/unanimous consent statements further extend the length of Routine Proceedings and out of respect for the families involved, should be held when there are more Members and Ministers in the House, which would be the case if Routine Proceedings were all held together in the afternoon.

A bell to signal the start of QP will not solve the greater problem of disjointed proceedings in the House. Keith Leslie also mentioned in his presentation that it is more difficult to keep track of votes under the Provisional Standing Orders, "because these kinds of important votes are now all over the place."

In trying to address this issue, the Liberal members in committee have created other issues. For example, they have recommended that "Deferred Votes" be moved from the afternoon to the morning after a 10:30 am Question Period, and that "Petitions" now take place in the afternoon somewhere under Routine Proceedings. With 5 minutes for "Introduction of Guests" by MPPs, Question Period will end at about 11:35 am. (If the Speaker chooses to introduce dignitaries, QP could end even later.) With a recorded vote, morning proceedings will end at about 11:47 am. As Ministers exit the East Lobby to be scrummed, there will be 5 minutes of bells on mornings with recorded votes, which will be an unnecessary distraction for reporters.

As mentioned earlier, Keith Leslie indicated in the Press Gallery presentation that if QP were to continue to be held in the morning, it should end by 11:15 am. So if this government really wanted to help the Press Gallery, they would hold QP at 1 pm as our Party has repeatedly suggested. The Press Gallery really just wants a firm start time and firm end time to QP, but this government doesn't listen to what it doesn't want to hear.

The second issue the Liberal members in committee have created is punting "Petitions" out of a prime-time spot, once again displaying their lack of concern for the role of non-Cabinet MPPs.

Another example of total disdain and disrespect for the role of MPPs found in the Provisional Standing Orders is the fact that the government has moved Private Members' Business (PMB) from Thursday mornings to Thursday afternoons, effectively relegating PMB to bottom-of-the-barrel status. At that time of day on a Thursday, with usually no government business left to be debated, few Members remain in the House. The Liberals may have added one more item of Private Members' Business, but this is just one extra bill that won't ever see the light of day. We can't even get this government to agree to allow Private Members' bills that go through committee to be automatically brought back to the House for a vote, so why should anyone expect that more Private Members' Business will mean more bills passed?

The government has also overlooked this important consideration, as the Liberal members of committee pressed for continuation of PMB in the Thursday afternoon time slot. While the Liberals proposed co-sponsorship of bills in committee, this will not make PMB more meaningful, as it will not guarantee that more PMBs will get passed.

If the Liberals are sincere about making PMB more relevant, it should be discussed more extensively at another time. Co-sponsorship of PMBs, a Liberal idea that came out of the blue in committee with no prior notice, could be addressed at that time, as well as our idea of mandating that all PMBs that make it through committee automatically be referred to the House for a vote, allowing for more closure. We could also include a review of how other jurisdictions conduct PMB. For example, in Alberta, PMBs can be referred to a "Policy Field Committee" after First Reading, and Cabinet Ministers can easily transfer PMBs to Government Business under "Introduction of Bills".

During the hearings, the Liberals also trial-ballooned a House schedule of 4 weeks on, 1 week off, or 3 weeks on, 1 week off to start in February 2009. It is important to note here that we have yet to see a revised Parliamentary Calendar showing exactly how this new schedule would work. Presenters at committee and MPPs in our Caucus obviously would not have had the opportunity to adequately address either the PMB co-sponsorship or alternating schedule ideas, since they are not part of the Provisional Standing Orders.

The Liberal members in committee also recommended out of left field that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario begin accepting on-line petitions. We were rather surprised that the Premier, pre-empting the committee's report, launched an E-petition on September 22, 2008, sending the false signal that on-line petitions are accepted in Ontario.

We commented in committee that these and any other new ideas should be discussed by the House Leaders, since most of the people involved in the review process were under the distinct impression that the committee was mandated to review the Provisional Standing Orders as they are written.

We listened during the hearings and were prepared to consider sensible changes that benefit as many affected people as possible. Based on the direction of the report, supported by the Liberal majority of members on the committee, it has become clear to us that the government only heard what they wanted to hear in committee. Unfortunately, this selective hearing turned the committee process into a pointless, patronizing exercise to be ignored.

We sincerely hope that this report will not be given the same dismissive treatment.

Attachments:

- 2 charts that represent options based on what we heard in the hearings, each with a 1 pm Question Period and united Routine Proceedings

Weekly House Schedule – Option A

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
MORNING		**CAUCUS**	**9:30 am – noon** (DEBATE) **CABINET***	**9:30 am – noon** (PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS with three items of business)	
AFTERNOON	**1 pm – 6:30 pm** ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS, starting with Question Period DEBATE	**1 pm – 6:30 pm** ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS, starting with Question Period DEBATE	**1 pm – 6:30 pm** ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS, starting with Question Period DEBATE	**1 pm – 6:30 pm** ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS, starting with Question Period DEBATE	

*Cabinet and debate in the House would occur simultaneously. The current government has plenty of Members outside of Cabinet to keep quorum in the House for just one morning per week. Quorum is 12 Members, which includes the Speaker.

Weekly House Schedule – Option B

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
MORNING		**CAUCUS**	**9 am – noon** (DEBATE) **CABINET***	**9 am – noon** (PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS with three items of business)	
AFTERNOON	**1 pm – 6 pm** ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS, starting with Question Period DEBATE	**1 pm – 6 pm** ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS, starting with Question Period DEBATE	**1 pm – 6 pm** ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS, starting with Question Period DEBATE	**1 pm – 6 pm** ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS, starting with Question Period DEBATE	

*Cabinet and debate in the House would occur simultaneously. The current government has plenty of Members outside of Cabinet to keep quorum in the House for just one morning per week. Quorum is 12 Members, which includes the Speaker.

APPENDIX B

DISSENTING OPINION

OF THE

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE

DISSENTING REPORT OF THE NDP CAUCUS TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS-STANDING ORDER REFORM

Question Period Shift

All students of parliamentary democracy agree that question period is so fundamentally important to accountability in our system of government that reducing its effectiveness represents a real blow to our form of democracy. That's why the NDP believes that question period deserves to be positioned during the time in the day when it's most accessible for the public, either through their physical presence in the legislature's observation galleries, through the Legislative Assembly broadcast, or through the media.

The media agrees with this perspective. In a letter to the government the press gallery, Randy Rath on behalf of the Queen's Park press Gallery, exhorts this government to not move question period to 10:45 a.m. saying:

"The fact that post-question-period scrums would take place shortly before noon would make it difficult, if not impossible, for broadcast reporters to attend while they are filing for noon newscasts or doing live hits at noon....

"On cabinet and caucus days, reporters now have two opportunities to scrum ministers, in the morning and again in the afternoon following question period. The new schedule would cut this access in half."

These sentiments were echoed by Professor Graham White, perhaps the foremost student of Ontario political institutions. In addition to authoring the most widely used textbook on Ontario politics, Professor White offered a lengthy analysis of question period and its importance to the legislature in a letter dated April 22, 2008, to Howard Hampton, leader of the NDP. In this letter he writes in part:

"As mentioned above, while there is room to debate many of the proposed rule changes, I cannot imagine that any neutral observer could disagree that moving question period into the morning would very seriously detract from the strongest accountability mechanism available to the opposition....

"In short, a vibrant, effective question period is essential to the health of democracy in this province.

"Moving question period into the morning would severely undercut its effectiveness. I understand that the government's initial plan was to begin question period at 9 a.m. While the revised proposed starting time of 10:45 a.m. is somewhat better, it would still leave the opposition in a very difficult position. Effective questions require planning, research

and reflection. This is difficult enough when question period occurs early in the afternoon but would be all but impossible for a morning question period ... whatever changes are made to the starting and ending time of the legislative day, there is absolutely no need whatsoever to change the time of question period."

In our opinion, Professor White makes a powerful case for maintaining an afternoon Question Period and the NDP wish his words had carried the day.

Missed Opportunities for Accountability Reform.

In addition to the misguided shift of Question Period to early morning, the government passed over the opportunity to increase accountability through other changes in the Standing Orders that could have been made.

Of late, numerous scholars have decried the declining effectiveness of our parliamentary institutions in holding the government of the day accountable. Some of the more prominent recent books on the subject include Donald Savoie's book "Court Government in Canada and Great Britain" and Professor David Docherty's "democratic audit" of Canadian legislatures entitled "Legislatures".

Even a brief survey of these and related publications suggests numerous changes to the Standing Orders that could have been made to increase accountability in this legislature. A short list might include the following:

1) That private members' business be conducted on Thursday morning (as opposed to afternoon), with three private members' bills or resolutions debated each day.

2) That all Standing Committees of the Legislature be chaired by Opposition members.

3) That all bills receiving second reading approval and forwarded to Committee, be automatically guaranteed at least two hours of public hearings.

4) That there be at least three working days between the final day of Committee hearings on a bill and the deadline for submitting amendments to the Clerk for clause by clause.

5) That all Committee reports be guaranteed at least one hour of debate in the full chamber.

In conclusion, the NDP regrets the move of Question Period to early morning as well as the missed opportunities to make Standing Order reforms that would reverse the trend towards declining accountability in the Ontario Legislature.